

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: EarthCorps  
Program Name: EarthCorps Corps Program

Application ID: 14ES156972

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

##### Strengths:

The applicant clearly demonstrates the need to clean up Puget Sound. Various populations are negatively affected by the toxicity in Puget Sound. Killer whales carry high levels of chemicals; tribal nations are imperiled; exports of contaminated geoduck clams were banned by China last year. Low-income residents seeking food resources from local food banks consume seafood.

The need for watershed restoration services is established by the measurement of 9,000 metric tons of toxic chemicals by Puget Sound Partnership and the Chinese importation ban on Puget Sound clams within the past six years.

The Department of Ecology study effectively demonstrates a significant quantity of pollution entering the Sound annually.

The proposed activities, including planting conifers and removing invasive plant species, are logically aligned with the outputs and outcomes of native regeneration and trail maintenance.

The proposed activity of AmeriCorps service members training and leading volunteers and graduating the program are likely to be effective in educating volunteers and increasing their own knowledge and skills.

The applicant presents a convincing argument that AmeriCorps Members can successfully and realistically effect positive change through the defined interventions based upon the solid experimental study by Seattle Urban nature.

The applicant has developed a solid intervention plan based upon EPA's 2011 conclusion that a buffer of forests along streams reduced contaminated water runoff in the Chesapeake Bay.

The interventions are reasonably well-aligned with the stated problem and recommended mediation in other polluted watersheds.

The applicant demonstrates the ability to effectively recruit and mobilize a large number of volunteers and presents a compelling case for "community-based environmental restoration" by exceeding their goal of 10,000 volunteers.

The applicant demonstrates previous experience supporting and working with volunteers, managing RFPs, and managing contracts.

The applicant has defined nearly identical outputs as previous service years and has demonstrated they are capable of exceeding these projections.

The applicant's past performance shows well-documented results in meeting or exceeding performance measure targets of 100 acres and the 10,000 volunteers.

#### Weaknesses:

The cited studies (Brett, Matteo, EPA) calling for increased forestation did not clearly match the stated need to clean up Puget Sound. The stated need is to clean Puget Sound, but the studies cited are regarding reforestation positively affecting storm runoff. However, the link between a clean Puget Sound and storm runoff is implied instead of being clearly stated. The applicant states that the most common chemical pathway is storm water runoff, but provides no data indicating how much or how reforestation will help the problem.

“Under Superfund, the EPA, Port and industrial polluters are cleaning up pollution that has already reached the water.” This statement negates the argument that there is a prevalent and severe need for intervention where community members will serve. The applicant goes on to state that more is needed, but it’s not clear why more is needed, or that leadership of AmeriCorps volunteers will help clean up Puget Sound. The proposed activities (reforestation, leadership) do not align with the stated problem/need.

The project sites are not delineated, but the organization appears well equipped to determine what needs to be done and where. Clearly defining the project sites would allow for the activities (members, dosage, etc.) to be spelled out which in turn would strengthen the application.

The applicant provides insufficient documentation to document the degree to which these problems impact Puget Sound and it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence in the targeted area.

The applicant’s claim that China’s recent ban on tainted geoduck clams had a negative economic impact is somewhat weakened by the absence of quantifiable losses.

The applicant’s description of the \$147 million impact of fishing lacked the historical context that would allow the reader to determine if the level of pollutants was having an impact on the fishing industry.

The applicant’s description of the people regularly consuming fish from the sound lacks a quantification of the number of people involved. It is difficult to determine if this is a significant problem.

The 2005 EPA study documenting PCB's in the Sound is unconvincing in describing the status of the problem in

2014 since it is 9 years old.

The applicant states that the Theory of Change follows the successful Chesapeake Bay model, but does not clearly define what that model entails.

The applicant does not sufficiently identify how the proposed activity of ecological restoration will result in cleaning up Puget Sound.

The prescribed activity of improving trails seems superfluous to the primary problem of a contaminated watershed.

It is unclear how the project work in wilderness (non-urban) areas will impact the identified problem of storm water runoff pollution which was cited as the major source of the pollution.

It is unclear if the volunteers who become "stewards" are effectively initiating efforts to further the restoration goals. Documentation of volunteers or community organizations who continue restoration efforts without the direct involvement of the AmeriCorps Members is absent.

The applicant does not demonstrate past success in cleaning Puget Sound. The applicant states that "in the past three years, EarthCorps met or exceeded all performance targets" but does not define what exceeding all performance measure targets (including number of at-risk ecosystem acres) means. It is unclear what "a target of 100 acres of at risk ecosystems was exceeded (actual: 142 acres) and in 2012 and 2011, the target of 80 acres of at risk ecosystems was exceeded (2012 actual: 120 acres...)" means.

While the applicant exceeded output measures in 2012 and 2011, they do not provide any analysis of the impact of these past interventions on the quality of the Puget Sound watersheds. The absence of such analysis requires an assumption by the reader.

The application is lacking evidence the program has had some type of impact on the overall health of Puget Sound.